

At Work: Condo owners expect board members to act like managers

by *Lindsey_Novak*

Q: I have an unusual workplace question because it combines volunteer jobs with paid jobs. I am on a volunteer board of directors for a condominium association's large complex. We have a paid management company and a full-time onsite manager, who is paid by the management company but takes instructions from our board. Some of the board members are more approachable than others. I am one of the approachable ones. Because of that, people stop me all the time to ask questions about condo issues, financial issues and whatever else happens to be on their minds. I am always friendly when approached, but I tell the residents to talk to the property manager. Many people continue talking even after my request, and it takes various explanations about why they should direct their questions to her for them to stop.

I recently overheard some gossip about how I am trying to get out of my responsibilities as a board member, but that is not at all the case. We pay a full-time manager to handle everything. When she is faced with issues she doesn't know how to handle or things that she thinks might cause trouble, she brings them to our (the board's) attention, and we discuss them and get back to her. Many of my friends tell me that being on the board is a thankless job, but I rather like it, even though it's volunteer work. I just don't want to hear about these issues on a 24/7 basis. How do I end this gossip? I am not trying to escape responsibility, but I now find myself having to avoid residents, which is obviously not easy to do.

A: All condominium associations have bylaws and rules that have been approved by their attorneys. Copies of those documents should be distributed to all condo owners. The bylaws and rules also should be explained fully to property managers because the managers may be confronted by residents and asked to give reasons for various rules. Typically, the manager is given responsibility by the board and asked to collect letters regarding problems, to handle those letters according to the rules, and to contact the board regarding unusual, sensitive or legal matters.

If the board feels confident about the manager's communication and management skills, it should distribute a formal letter to all residents detailing the manager's job and responsibilities and procedures on how to report issues and problems. Don't assume residents know this information; the board must spell it out clearly. Many managers are afraid of over-explaining things, but clear, direct communication solves a multitude of problems.

If none of your board members has solid writing skills, ask your condo attorneys to write the letter. Gossip about any of the board members should stop once residents understand the process.

Friendly Environment Disappeared After Layoffs

Q: Since the layoffs at our university, the atmosphere has changed from friendly to competitive. People are trying to outdo one another in case there's another round of layoffs, to the point that we can feel the insecurity

in the air. It's one thing for staff members to have strong work ethics; it's another thing when every task is treated like a contest. How ironic that a university doesn't realize this increased stress level is going to reduce the camaraderie that created the enjoyable environment that made the generally lower salaries tolerable.

A: The domino effect in cutbacks is rarely positive, whether at a university or a corporation. When money is the sole focus, all types of organizations become shortsighted in their goals.

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